

IBSEN'S BASTARDS

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A full-length play

By Bill Plott

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

In Order of Appearance:

JOHN (JENS) BLEGEN, a young farm worker

ANNA LARSEN, August's wife

AUGUST LARSEN, farm owner

KATIE (KADLIN) LARSEN, Anna and August's daughter

MR. JOHNSON, local farmer

MARIA, Mr. Johnson's daughter

Silent Characters:

Boy in wagon

Man on street

Boy in livery stable

IBSEN'S BASTARDS

SCENE 1

AT RISE:

The stage is dark; possibly some video or film showing livestock huddled against the wind; a few wagons and sleds attempt to navigate disappearing roads in a fierce snow storm.

When lights come up the stage is split; skeletal scenery shows AUGUST LARSEN'S farmhouse; table, chairs, large fireplace, doors to the kitchen, outside, barn, and a door to the stairs to the second floor of the house. The second floor is a raised level, again shown by skeletal scenery with a stairway leading up to it.

Upstage is a small area suggesting the barn, where we find JOHN BLEGEN, heavily clothed, every inch of skin covered except his eyes. He has closed the outside doors to the barn.

He slumps inside the door, gets up, uncovers part of his face. He stares blankly at the floor, blows into his gloves and shakes himself.

JOHN

Jesus. Nothing for it.

He pushes his way through the door to the outside (off-stage).

ANNA LARSEN enters from the stairway to the parlor of the farm house;

she is 38, tall and striking if heavier, slightly worn and less blonde than the girl she was some twenty years earlier when her husband paid her family for her from Norway for an arranged marriage.

John comes in from the outside door with a bag of feed over his shoulder, struggles to pull the door shut. He leans against the door inside, unwraps, wipes his mouth, spits, crouches.

JOHN

Fuck.

Inside AUGUST LARSEN enters from the stairs, sits at the table; he's a balding, heavy-set man of 53 with cold blue eyes, several inches shorter than his wife and daughter. Anna doesn't look at him. She leaves the room, comes back in quickly with coffee and a plate of food; she puts it down in front of August and goes back to the kitchen.

John comes in; noise of wind and snow; he stamps his feet, goes to the fireplace, hangs his coat on a rack; John is young, muscular, fair and handsome, much taller than August.

August looks up when he enters.

AUGUST

Cold night. Cows all right?

JOHN

Yeah.

AUGUST

Pigs?

JOHN

In the barn. Should be fine.

AUGUST  
Should be? Did you look, Jens?

JOHN  
Not yet.

AUGUST  
What do I pay you for--

JOHN  
Pay? Shit, that's good.

AUGUST  
Yes, pay. And I won't stand you cursing in my house,  
neither. There's plenty of good men willing--

JOHN  
Like hell there are.

AUGUST  
You don't talk to me like that.

JOHN  
There's ice and snow out there enough to kill a man, I'll  
talk to you any way I want. I need a drink.

KATIE LARSEN, a tall, energetic,  
dark-haired 16 year-old copy of her  
mother, comes down the stairs and  
listens behind the door.

AUGUST  
What kind of man has a drink before breakfast--

JOHN  
A freezing man, Mr. Larsen. After breakfast, and after I  
have a drink, I'll check the animals again.

AUGUST  
Jens--

JOHN  
It's John. We're in Minnesota, not fucking Norway, so it's  
John.

Katie comes noisily into the room.

AUGUST  
Good morning, Kadlin.

KATIE

Good morning, Poppa.

AUGUST

Your mother's in the kitchen.

KATIE

I'll go help her. Morning, John.

AUGUST

Tell her to bring me more coffee. Quick.

KATIE

You want a cup, John?

AUGUST

Never mind. Hurry up, girl.

Katie goes in the kitchen. John goes to a cabinet and reaches for a bottle.

AUGUST (CONT'D)

Have one if you need it. How many degrees of frost you think?

JOHN

(Pours a drink.)

Don't know. Only December--it'll get worse.

AUGUST

I'm sure the stock--

JOHN

I'll check the barn after I eat.

AUGUST

It's just . . . I don't like Kadlin to hear us. She's a child.

John finishes his drink and puts the cup down loudly on the table.

AUGUST (CONT'D)

I'll get more aquavit from home at Christmas--nothing like it here.

Anna and Katie come in with coffee and food.

August tries to kiss Anna; she pulls away before he can and pours him a cup of coffee.

Anna

Best eat quick--food won't keep warm.

John sits; Anna looks past August at him, looks away, goes back into the kitchen. John finishes his drink.

JOHN

I need coffee.

(Goes into the kitchen.)

Anna puts the dishes in a large sink, sloshes water on them, stops, leans over the sink, closes her eyes, leans back. John comes in, puts the cup down and embraces her roughly from behind, kissing her neck and running his hands over her thighs.

Anna

(Whispers.)

She's just the other side of the door.

Anna presses his hands hard against her body, leans back against him quickly, closes her eyes, breaks from him, picks up his cup and pours coffee in it. He kisses her quickly as she hands it to him.

ANNA (CONT'D)

Don't. Get--

JOHN

I'm going.

(Pushes the door open.)

Katie chews on a roll as she walks around the room. As she speaks John sits at the table.

KATIE

(To her father.)

Why do you disapprove of aquavit on such a cold morning? You have it sometimes when your arm hurts.

AUGUST

There are things aren't fit for a child, Kadlin.

KATIE

I'm sixteen. Wouldn't I be married in Norway already, with a baby or two?

AUGUST

Don't be fresh. You tell me all the time we're Americans, that you're Katie, not Kadlin.

The men eat in silence; John finishes quickly, picks up his dishes and stands up.

KATIE

I'll take them, John.

AUGUST

Leave them.

Anna leans against the sink and listens to August and John.

JOHN

Thanks, Miss. The pump's frozen maybe, but I try it--

KATIE

Don't get lazy with your English. "I will try it."

JOHN

I will check before I unfreeze it.

AUGUST

Make sure the rig and horse are ready--I need to go into Erskine this afternoon.

JOHN

The storm's bad--

AUGUST

Not your business. Anyway, I'm not staying long.

JOHN

No. I'll get the sled ready.



John puts on his coat and goes into the barn. Katie starts picking up the dishes.

AUGUST

Leave them I said. You have school. Your friend, what's her name--

KATIE

Maria.

AUGUST

Her father's coming, so go.

KATIE

There's time. Maybe with the storm there won't be any--

AUGUST

You're too familiar, Kadlin. Calling him John.

KATIE

What?

AUGUST

You know what I mean. Mr. Blegen. Jens. Bad enough you're around him much as you are.

KATIE

(Picks up the dishes.)

But we're--

John works at the pump, blows on his hands.

Anna listens at the door.

August stands up and grabs Katie's arm.

AUGUST

Talking to me that way in front of a . . . hired man. You listen and listen good. What do you know about Mr. Blegen? Huh?

KATIE

He's young, he works hard, he's kind. He's quiet. And he's intelligent. I like him.

August lets go of Katie's arm and sits down.

AUGUST

From a foundling home--a bastard, did you know that?

Katie stands by the kitchen door.

KATIE

He's not the first. Anyway, it wasn't his doing, was it? Pastor says--

AUGUST

I've had enough of Pastor. And your disrespect. You keep your distance from Blegen, you hear?

Katie comes back to the table and puts the dishes down.

KATIE

As you wish, Father.

She exits by the stairs.

Anna stands with her back to the door; she smooths her apron, wipes her forehead, pushes the door open.

Anna comes in, starts to clear the table.

AUGUST

I'm going into Erskine. To see Wallace.

ANNA

Yes? Bad snow coming, I think.

Anna opens the door to the stairs.

ANNA (CONT'D)

Katie?

KATIE

Yes, Momma?

AUGUST

You want to know why I'm seeing Wallace?

ANNA

(To Katie offstage.)

Don't be late. The storm looks serious.

(To August.)

You'll tell me what I need to know.

Upstairs in the hall Katie pulls a heavy winter coat around her and lifts her bookbag the stairs and enters the parlor.

KATIE

Stop fussing, Momma. 'Bye, Father.  
(She exits through the main door.)

AUGUST

Remember what I told you, child.

Anna's back is to August as she watches Katie go.

ANNA

What was it you told her.

AUGUST

She needs to be less familiar with Blegen.  
(Stands at the fire.)  
A man from that kind of place, who drinks, heaven knows what else.

ANNA

He's a decent sort.

AUGUST

You as well? You going to throw Pastor at me, while it's me who pays Jens? Or is it just that he's a new man around here.

ANNA

I didn't say anything about Pastor.

AUGUST

In Norway a man like him wouldn't dare talk to me the way he does. Not to decent folk, not even to such as yours.

ANNA

No.

AUGUST

No. I'll tell you why I'm going to town. Wallace told me about some land I can get cheap. The farm would be twice the size it is now.

ANNA

(Polishes the table.)

If you think it makes sense.

AUGUST

If I think--of course it makes sense, woman. It's the only way I'll ever make enough for the place to amount to anything. Don't be stupid, Anna. When you came here, when I sent for you from Norway, I told you then that one day I'd make my fortune, and I'd take you, my family, children, the money I make here, and go back home, because this--

(He pounds the table.)

--this isn't home.

ANNA

You never said anything.

AUGUST

What?

ANNA

You never told me you were going to take me back . . . There. When I came. And we've been here so long, we built the house, the farm. Katie--

AUGUST

Is a good girl. But not a son.

SCENE 1-A

EXT. Road - MORNING

Note: this will only work if there is video: otherwise cut the scene entirely.

Katie and her friend MARIA huddle beneath rough fur blankets in the back of a wagon; Maria's father, MR. JOHNSON, urges his horses forward into the storm; there is weak light through the wind and snow.

MARIA

(Shouting.)

Should we turn back, Father?

MR. JOHNSON  
(Over his shoulder.)

Horses know the road. Don't worry. A little snow in December. Nothing unusual.

SCENE 1: Cont.

In the barn, John struggles to get the horse and sled ready; the part of his face exposed to the wind has rime on it. He pushes the door to the house open.

John comes in with snow blowing behind him; Anna gets up and goes into the kitchen.

JOHN  
Snow's worse. Rig's ready if you want. Susie's harnessed.

AUGUST  
The roads are still clear, I'm sure. Look, John, if the storm's heavy and I get caught, you know--look after things 'til I get back.

(Laughs.)  
Don't know what I'm going on about. Snow in Minnesota. Come give me a hand.

August takes his coat and goes into the barn; John looks after him, looks into the kitchen, looks at the bottle on the table, warms his hands at the fire and follows August into the barn.

August gets into a small sled near the door; barn goes dark; we hear the storm, hear the doors closed, hear John and August shouting to each other and at the horse.

John comes in, shakes the snow from his coat, takes the bottle from the table. Anna comes in from the kitchen.

JOHN  
Not my concern.

ANNA

(Behind him; he hasn't seen  
her.)

Not your concern? How is not your concern?

He looks at her, looks away.

ANNA (CONT'D)

If he goes back to Norway, I can't stay here.

JOHN

No.

ANNA

You don't care?

JOHN

I don't say that. But what difference does it make.

ANNA

You're cold as he is.

(Pause.)

Do you love me at all?

JOHN

It's not that.

ANNA

I've thought of it, you know. Dreamed of it.

JOHN

What.

ANNA

Him dead.

(Pause.)

God help me, but I have. Don't tell me it never came into  
your mind.

JOHN

No. Gone maybe. But not dead. I don't . . . It's not what  
I think.

ANNA

Don't be like that. Don't pretend.

(Pause.)

You have more to do?

JOHN

Stock's in, everything's closed up. I'll check it all this  
afternoon.

ANNA

Katie won't be back until late. And he won't be back until tomorrow in this storm.

JOHN

Maybe.

John comes up behind her, pulls her back against him, holds his cup up to her.

JOHN (CONT'D)

You want some.

ANNA

No.

(Leans back, kisses his neck.)

I hate him. I know I shouldn't but I do.

JOHN

He's not here. He's gone. Have a drink, then we go upstairs and--

ANNA

"Then we go upstairs--"

JOHN

--forget all of it for a few hours. It's one thing winter's good for.

ANNA

(Laughs.)

That's your solution. Get drunk and take me to bed. Pay him back.

JOHN

Easy for you to laugh.

John goes to the table, drinks from the bottle, puts it down, steadies himself. Anna embraces him from behind.

ANNA

They aren't anything, John. None of them. You're right.

(Leans against the table.)

And about winter.

JOHN

How?

ANNA

We have the house to ourselves.

(Kisses him hard.)

Listen. You can hear the snow. We can stay here by the fire.

JOHN

That would be some sight for Katie.

ANNA

I don't care.

She kisses him, unbuttons her dress, then pulls it over head, kneels in front of John's chair.

JOHN

(Leans down, runs his hands over her body.)

A soft bed suits me better, thank you.

ANNA

(Pulls at his clothes.)

Where's my fiery young man now?

JOHN

(Laughs.)

You making fun?

ANNA

God, I hate this country--it's too hard and cold for anybody to survive.

JOHN

It's only country. And there's us here, nobody else. Remember?

ANNA

I can dream. For a moment I can--

JOHN

Yes?

ANNA

Listen.



They kiss, he pushes her onto the table and they start to have sex. Storm sounds.

SCENE 1-B

EXT. STORM

(Video.)

First a long shot of fields, woods, sky, snow; then the Larsen barnyard; then three wagons laboring, barely visible on a rough road with deep tracks.

SCENE 1 - Cont.

Anna and John, now mostly naked, gather their clothes and move upstairs; she is careful not to leave anything behind, while clearly eager to have him again; they stop several times on their way to the bedroom. The door closes behind them.

SLOW BLACKOUT.

## SCENE 2-A

EXT. ROAD - DAY

(Video.)

Katie, Maria, another girl and a boy are huddled under rugs and blankets in the back of a wagon; two men are driving a team of oxen with the storm at their back; their voices can't be heard above the storm; the road has completely disappeared.

## SCENE 2

Anna and John lie under the covers.

ANNA

I was a girl when I first came here--when he had me brought over, like I was . . . He looked at me like I was an animal. I was just a girl. Younger than Kadlin.

John

Kadlin?

ANNA

You know--don't tease. I was beautiful then--

JOHN

You're beautiful now.

ANNA

I've almost forgotten Norway. Bergen, where my people came from. I hated the winters there. I hated the dark.

(Laughs.)

When my mother told me they'd arranged for me to go to America, I thought, well, at least the winters won't be so hard--what a little fool I was, huh? People there won't look at you the same, Mama said.

JOHN

I heard the same lies. America. There's no difference.

(He pours a drink from a bottle on the bedside table.)

You want some?

ANNA

No.

She leans back against his chest,  
kisses him, runs her hands over his  
body under the quilt.

JOHN

And if August was gone? What then?

ANNA

He couldn't touch me again. This ridiculous idea he has that  
he'll take us back there to Norway--August Larsen, the big  
man. He's small and ugly and horrible. Makes me want to  
scream.

JOHN

He's your husband all the same.

ANNA

Oh, God. He . . . He never said anything, but I knew. And  
no son, only Katie--he hates that. He . . . The old country,  
Jesus, nobody there would remember him after forty years, but  
he thinks he'd be some big man. You tell me, John. How do I  
spend another night with him?

JOHN

So leave him.

ANNA

And do what.

JOHN

Take Katie. Go back to your people.

ANNA

My people? My mother's dead, my father wouldn't have me.  
I'm as much an orphan as you. When I left--no, when they  
sent me--it was for good.

JOHN

I don't know then.

ANNA

(Looks at his face; he looks  
away.)

Where are you? You're thinking--

JOHN

I hate them, men like him. I . . . Worse was the Sisters.  
Back home. You don't know. They were worse.

Every kindness for the orphan boy--"Remember your place."  
Like a bad fucking story. And now, August, his friends, they  
think a little dirt makes them something when they never had  
an idea in their life. He don't know anything about you. Or  
Katie.

ANNA

Katie? What about--

JOHN

I don't know.

(He pulls her down on him.)

ANNA

Forget all that. You're here. With me. Forget the rest.

Slow fade.

## SCENE 3

Anna smiles and buttons her dress as she walks down the stairs to the parlor. Storm sounds from outside.

John dresses in the bedroom.

Anna crosses to the fire and stirs the ashes; her dress is partly unbuttoned; she rubs her neck and hums as she goes into the kitchen. She comes back with an armful of kindling and calls up the stairs.

ANNA

(Calls up the stairs.)

It's freezing down here. You need to get wood.

She smiles, buttons her dress and goes back in the kitchen.

JOHN

(Still upstairs.)

Yes, Mrs. Larsen. Right away, m'am.

John comes in and looks at the fire.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Though it's your fault we stayed upstairs so long. Anna?

Katie struggles to push the front door to the house open.

Anna comes in from the kitchen.

ANNA

You blame me? You've got nerve--

Katie comes in, stops, looks at Anna, then at John.

ANNA (CONT'D)

Kadlin--what--

KATIE

(Stomping her feet.)

I had to use the front door--snow's so deep we couldn't get around the back.

ANNA

Why are you . . . Why aren't you in school? I don't . . . There's no dinner ready, I didn't think you'd be home so soon.

KATIE

They let us go early. The road's snowed in. The storm's amazing.

JOHN

You see anybody out there?

KATIE

No. Who would I see?

John goes out.

KATIE (CONT'D)

Who did he mean?

ANNA

Your father, I suppose. I'll get dinner started. The stove's hot.

KATIE

Poppa?

ANNA

Yes. Because of the snow.

KATIE

(Hangs up her coat, stirs the fire. Looks around the room.)

Why's there no fire?

ANNA

I'll get dinner.

KATIE

I've eaten already.

ANNA

I haven't. It's cold and I'm sure Mr. Blegen--

KATIE

"Mr. Blegen"? You never called him that to me. What--

ANNA

I'm sure he's hungry. He's been working all morning.

KATIE

In the storm?

Anna goes into the kitchen; John comes in with firewood; Katie stares at him.

JOHN

You must be cold, Miss. You should warm up before dinner.

KATIE

"Miss"? My father's not here, John.

(She stands and stretches.)

And thank God I'm not in school. I don't know why my father insists I go, in Red Lake Falls of all places.

JOHN

You don't mean that. You do good in school.

KATIE

I do well. And that doesn't sound like you.

JOHN

No?

KATIE

No. Not the young hero who tells me to think for myself, not to let these ignorant farmers make me think like--

JOHN

But first you got to . . . I mean, I wouldn't know, I never had a chance at it, but you, you have to think of, of everything I couldn't.

John picks up the bottle. Katie watches him pour a drink.

JOHN (CONT'D)

You and Anna know there's more than the farm, this country, little men with stupid, sad dreams. So you want--

John sees Katie looking at him and stops, smiles at her.

JOHN (CONT'D)

You're laughing. I sound . . .

KATIE

No. You're just--

Anna comes in with food and puts it  
on the table.

KATIE (CONT'D)

I told you I ate already.

ANNA

So eat what you want. John, sit.

He pours another drink from the  
bottle.

ANNA (CONT'D)

You need that with dinner?

JOHN

I do, Mrs. Larsen. The cold is bad, and there's work after I  
eat. Life's not all pleasure, is it.

KATIE

It was Anna a minute ago.

ANNA

What are you talking about?

KATIE

John was explaining how there's more in heaven and earth than  
are dreamed of in Minnesota.

ANNA

Let's hope so.

JOHN

Make fun, but the . . . alternative is no good.

ANNA

The alternative?

JOHN

To her dreams.

KATIE

My dreams?



JOHN

Some farmer, maybe country doctor, who will take you . . .  
Come to think of it, your Hamlet was a Dane, right? Plenty  
of them 'round here.

ANNA

Snow brings out the poet in you.

JOHN

'S true.

(He reaches for the bottle.)

ANNA

After your work, I think.

JOHN

Sure.

He gets his coat and goes out into  
the barn.

John shakes his head, looks around,  
grabs a pitchfork, curses under his  
breath.

Anna gathers the dishes.

KATIE

Why was the fire out? When I came in today, you and John--

ANNA

He's a good man, I don't know what we'd do without him. Your  
father's not so young as he was.

KATIE

You like him, don't you, Momma?

ANNA

Help me clear up.

KATIE

Makes sense. John's so different from Poppa. So you like  
him.

ANNA

He's a good man. Like I said, we need him.

KATIE

You know what I mean. He's young, good looking, you like him.

ANNA

(Puts the dishes down and sits.)

You have a lively imagination, Katie, you don't know what you're talking about.

KATIE

I know more than you think. About men and women. I'm not such a little girl any morer.

ANNA

What does that have to do with—

KATIE

You and John?

Katie rises, stretches and warms herself at the fire.

KATIE (CONT'D)

(Grins.)

When I saw you today, when I came in, for a second I thought—

ANNA

There's nothing to think about.

(Long pause.)

KATIE

Oh my God.

ANNA

What?

KATIE

No.

Katie turns away from her mother, breathes hard, walks across the room, then toward the door to the stairs, finally sits in a chair across the room; Anna looks at her, shrugs, busies herself, begins to speak almost as if to herself.

ANNA

We're friendly, we talk sometimes, there's time for that sort of thing in the winter. That's all.

KATIE

It's not . . .

ANNA

I understand if you like him, he's not like the boys you know, but that doesn't mean--

KATIE

You're . . . Of course . . . You're alone in the house with him in the middle of the day when Poppa's gone. What--

ANNA

Don't talk crazy. I told you, we're friends, that's all. There's nothing--

KATIE

(Gets up and moves to the door.)

No. My God.

ANNA

What are you talking about?

KATIE

You and John--

ANNA

Don't . . . You're talking crazy, Katie. Don't . . .

KATIE

What?

ANNA

If your father ever heard you--do you understand?

(Pause.)

I don't know what you're thinking, but it's not true.

Katie and Anna stand facing each other for a long beat; Katie is crying and Anna is frozen. Anna finally turns away from her daughter. Katie speaks to her mother's back.

KATIE

You should have thought about that before.

John comes in the house and almost falls from the wind and the liquor.

ANNA

Katie--

John looks at them as he hangs up his coat, knocks the snow and ice from his boots and stokes the fire.

JOHN

I don't think your husband will try to get home tonight.

ANNA

You must be frozen. I'll put water on for tea.

Anna goes into the kitchen. John stands at the fire as Katie studies him.

KATIE

What you said before, about the world beyond this place. You were talking about yourself. You know that, right?

JOHN

Not just me.

(Turns to face her.)

You want to get away from here. You should.

KATIE

So you and she would be alone. You'd like that, wouldn't you.

JOHN

What are you talking 'bout?

KATIE

(Sits at the table.)

What was going on between you and my mother when I came in? Or before I--

JOHN

Nothing.

(Pause.)

KATIE

You don't lie well, John.

JOHN

We're friends, me and her. Nothing else. And you be . . .

What? KATIE

Be what? (Pause.)

I don't know. JOHN

Why did you jump when I came home? Don't forget, I know you. KATIE  
She may not know about us, but--

Be quiet, Katie. This isn't-- JOHN

Oh my God. KATIE  
It's not enough-- (Long pause.)

What? JOHN

Me. I'm not-- KATIE

You need to be quiet, Katie. You and me, that wasn't-- JOHN

Katie gets up, turns her back to John, rubs her hand across her eyes, folds her arms across her chest.

It's true. KATIE

What. JOHN

You and my mother. KATIE

I never said-- JOHN

It's simple enough, isn't it? KATIE

JOHN

(Whispering.)

You don't want to say things can't be taken back.

KATIE

With her? How could you?

JOHN

I never said nothing like that. Your mother--

KATIE

You and me--

JOHN

What about it?

KATIE

"That wasn't" what? What? Because I won't do it?

JOHN

Don't--

KATIE

What kind of man--

JOHN

(He curses in Norwegian and  
then speaks in English.)

A man, all right? A . . . A bored man, stuck here on this  
God-forsaken farm in fucking Minnesota. Just . . .

KATIE

What?

JOHN

Be quiet.

John takes the bottle down and  
pours a drink.

JOHN (CONT'D)

You got to understand, Katie. The cold, this place, this  
whole country--

KATIE

I don't--

JOHN

--has me turned all round, it makes a man want to do  
something, anything to get away. I can't put it so good.

KATIE

And now you don't want any trouble from me, you don't want my mother to find out what kind--

JOHN

What kind of man I am? Not your kind, I guess.

KATIE

Don't feel sorry for yourself.

(Pause.)

So you prefer her. Is she better at--

JOHN

I told you--careful.

Anna comes in with a tray.

KATIE

Or what? I bet you were a smart little boy--

JOHN

Ya? Look where it got me.

KATIE

You're still young. I'd say you've got lots of prospects. Don't you think so, Momma?

ANNA

It's cold in here. The two of you should--

KATIE

The two of us?

ANNA

--warm yourselves. Have some tea.

KATIE

Or calm down.

Anna shoots John a glance; he stares at the fire.

ANNA

I didn't say that.

KATIE

Tell me, John--if you want to get away from here so much, what's keeping you from leaving?

JOHN

You . . . You know what. Winter and money. I owe your father from when I came here.

KATIE

Poor you. I'm sure he'd let you--

JOHN

You don't . . . I don't even . . . Did you know, not even my name is mine. You know that? I thought to change my name to something American. I asked once, before I left that fucking home, why they call me Blegen, was it my mother or what, and they told me don't ask.

KATIE

Change it, if you hate it so much.

JOHN

Nothing changes who I am.

KATIE

So--

ANNA

Katie, stop.

JOHN

She's curious, Mrs. Larsen--she wants to know what makes me how I am.

KATIE

Call her Anna. Stop acting like--

ANNA

Drink your tea.

KATIE

--I'm a child.

JOHN

I'll take a cup, Anna.

ANNA

(To Katie.)

You go too far.



I do? KATIE

I should go. JOHN

No. We're done, aren't we, Kadlin. ANNA

Yes. KATIE

Katie leaves, slams the door as she goes. Anna waits a few seconds before she speaks.

She knows. ANNA

She's a girl and she's mad at you. That's all. JOHN

Don't play dumb. She saw when she came in. ANNA

Saw what? She won't say nothing to him. JOHN

That's not the point. He's in your head maybe because you feel guilty, though you never did before. ANNA

It hasn't been so long, Anna. JOHN

That's cruel. ANNA

It's fact. JOHN

What do you talk about with her when you're alone?  
 (She stands behind John.)  
 She's fascinated by you. Whenever I find you, one of you is talking about dreams. ANNA

We talk, that's all. She's . . . JOHN

ANNA

She's what?

JOHN

She's young. A girl with--

Anna makes a noise, stands at the fire and looks down, away from John.

JOHN

What?

ANNA

I've been blind. You and her . . .

JOHN

I don't . . .

(Long pause.)

ANNA

You and me . . . I've never done this before, you know that, don't you? You're the first, the only man other than August. You're the first man I ever felt anything for.

John

Anna . . .

Anna looks at John as he looks down. She takes her cup into the kitchen. John sits at the table drinking; he adds aquavit to his tea.

SCENE 3 - a.

The countryside is buried by the snow and wind; a one-man horse-and-sled is just visible in the flat country under parallel rows of tall pines that mark a road.

## SCENE 4

Katie lies in her bed; she rises, strips down to a shift, shivers against the cold, looks at herself in a rough mirror over a dresser, brushes her hair, wipes her face, stands for a moment in the middle of her room, then burrows into her bed and grabs a book from beneath the lantern on her nightstand. She doesn't open it but lies in bed listening to storm.

Downstairs Anna enters from the kitchen with a fresh cup of tea and food. John is waiting at the table; she pushes a plate toward him; he eats automatically.

ANNA

Before, when I said I'd dreamed of August being gone, you said it wouldn't make any difference if he was dead.

JOHN

I said gone.

ANNA

If August takes us back to Norway you'll never see me again, and all you can say is it wouldn't make any difference.

JOHN

I can't follow you. Why are you--

ANNA

He's old, John. Nearly fifty-four, he won't live forever. If--

JOHN

What's the point of thinking that way?

ANNA

You don't . . . You say that because I'm old.

JOHN

No I don't.

ANNA

No?

(She gets up and leans  
against the fireplace.)

God, I hate him--he took everything from me, with this  
filthy, forsaken place.

JOHN

Don't.

Anna begins to cry. John gets up,  
tries to embrace her; she pushes  
him away.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Anna--

ANNA

Not while she's upstairs--

JOHN

She's not coming down now.

ANNA

She might hear.

JOHN

She can't hear us. Now who's afraid?

ANNA

Afraid?

(She turns and kisses him.)

Promise me one thing.

JOHN

What.

ANNA

(Grabs his arm.)

You have to promise me, John. I don't care what happens to  
me, August can't do anything more than what he's already  
done.

JOHN

Why would he do anything--

ANNA

Katie. Whatever happens, you're not for her.

John goes to the fire, throws wood on it, takes the bottle down and drinks from it.

ANNA (CONT'D)

You'll go with some other woman, a young girl, I've always known it, since our first time. That first morning in the fall, in the loft, you remember?

Anna waits for a reaction; there is none.

ANNA (CONT'D)

I knew you'd go off with somebody your age some day, and it nearly killed me. You thought I was crying because . . . I don't know what you thought. But not her, John. Not Katie. You have to swear that.

JOHN

Why do you keep on about it? Drop it.

Anna pours John a drink from the bottle and they sit next to each other at the table as the storm grows louder outside.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Anna, listen to me.

SCENE 4-a.

Storm in the countryside; storm in the farmyard.

SCENE 5

Anna and Katie wash up in the kitchen; they are quiet, careful; neither woman looks at the other.

ANNA

Whatever is or isn't going on between your father and me, you're what I think of first. And talking about this kind of thing would--

KATIE

I told you. I'm not a little girl.

No. But for me-- ANNA

Momma . . . KATIE

What. ANNA

It's all right. KATIE

Blackout.

## SCENE 5

Storm sounds; the room is darker; John sits at the table drinking from a cup. Voices come from the kitchen; after a few seconds John rises and goes out to the barn. Anna enters, looks for him, and adds wood to the fire. Katie joins her from the kitchen.

KATIE  
Sounds worse. Poppa will stay in town, won't he?

ANNA  
I think so.

KATIE  
John was quiet at supper. After this afternoon I don't blame him.

(Pause.)

ANNA  
For what?

KATIE  
Drinking when--like he does.

ANNA  
Sometimes. It's not easy for him here. It must get on his nerves, all of this.

KATIE  
All of this?

ANNA  
Us.

KATIE  
I'm sorry, Momma, about earlier. I don't blame you.

ANNA  
Your father and me--

KATIE  
Not Father.  
(Anna and Katie stare at each other.)

John.

ANNA

Don't.

KATIE

You can't pretend there's nothing.

ANNA

(Long pause.)

It would kill your father.

KATIE

No it wouldn't. He--

ANNA

Your father loves you, Katie.

KATIE

Poppa's a hard man.

ANNA

Be fair--he loves you.

KATIE

He'd love me more if I were a son. That's why I don't understand why he doesn't like John more, or any of the boys who've worked here.

ANNA

They remind him of his disappointment. Things haven't been easy for him, you know.

KATIE

That's what I mean. John came here with nothing, just like--

ANNA

I meant your father. Katie, you mustn't, no matter what you think you feel for John--

KATIE

Don't worry about me.

ANNA

(Slumps in a chair.)

What do you want from me?

KATIE

(Coldly.)

I don't know what you mean.



ANNA

I'm not--I don't have excuses, I know he's young, I know what everybody expects from me. In my village, before I left, my mother and my sisters--they told me it was a good thing my husband was older, they joked about it. My mother was sad, like she knew . . .

Anna takes the remaining dishes from the table and goes to kitchen door and stands, her back to Katie. She moves quickly, breathing hard.

ANNA (CONT'D)

Then she packed my chest and sent me off and that was that. I tried, Katie, I have tried. I've sworn since the day you were born that you'd never, ever have to make the choices I did. Then along comes a man, a last chance at something . . . I knew it was wrong, against man or God or . . . But I didn't think, I don't know, I didn't care. I know . . . I'll pay but I can't help it, no more than John can help having a drink, or your father can help being . . . cold and hard.

Anna exits into the kitchen.

John enters with an armful of wood, wipes his face, mutters, drops the wood.

Katie starts toward the kitchen after her mother, sees John and jumps back; John stands at the fire as Katie walks to the chair where her mother had been sitting before.

JOHN

Barn's set for the night.

KATIE

I should help my mother.

John gets the bottle and pours himself a drink.

JOHN

Jesus, I'm frozen through.

KATIE

Does that help?

JOHN

Thaws the blood.

KATIE

I think it's a weakness.

JOHN

And I think you're a kid who should . . . Who doesn't understand much.

KATIE

I thought you said I understand the world. Me and my mother. That we're different from the rest.

JOHN

Yeah.

KATIE

I'm not a fool.

JOHN

You and your mother are different though. What you and I got up to, I told you, it wasn't much.

KATIE

No?

JOHN

It was like we was kids, play acting or something. It wasn't real. You know it.

KATIE

And you and my mother?

John sits at the table and stares hard at Katie.

JOHN

You got nerve.

Katie starts to cross the room to the kitchen; John gets up, puts his arm clumsily around her waist; Katie steps away.

JOHN (CONT'D)

You are beautiful, when your blood's heated up.

KATIE

Only it doesn't mean anything. And then . . .

JOHN

What?

KATIE

You sleep with my mother.

John lets Katie go. She sits at  
the table.

KATIE (CONT'D)

What made you--

JOHN

Jesus. Leave it alone, little girl.

KATIE

Who was first?

JOHN

Shut up.

KATIE

What did you tell yourself? "I'll teach the bastard a  
lesson," was that it? Sleep with both of them? Because  
sooner or later you think I'll--

JOHN

Fuck.

KATIE

What--

JOHN

Fuck. If you're going to act grown up, then talk grown up.  
That's the word. Fuck.

KATIE

Don't.

JOHN

It's what happens. Men and women fuck, grown men and women,  
especially a man like me--

KATIE

Mother and daughter, like you said, we're alike. Maybe you can't see it, but Momma and I--

John moves behind Katie, grabs her shoulders, turns her around and kisses her. She kisses back for a moment and then pushes him off, wipes her mouth.

KATIE (CONT'D)

I--

JOHN

Maybe you're not such a little girl.

KATIE

I told you not to--

Anna comes in from the kitchen.

JOHN

Katie is worried, Mrs. Larsen, that I drink too much. Tonight I drink to warm up before I go out in the frost again, so if you don't mind, does Mr. Larsen have another bottle? This one's empty.

ANNA

I'll get another.

KATIE

Momma--

ANNA

You needn't fear, Kadlin, John is as free and uncorrupted as he was when he started working here. He probably wants to get away from Minnesota more than ever. Isn't that so, John?

KATIE

I didn't--

JOHN

She's teasing you, Katie. She's proud of you judging me. She wants you to.

KATIE

Do you want help, Momma?

ANNA

No. I'm nearly done.



## SCENE 5-A.

(Video if possible.)

August, WALLACE, and another man stand outside a storefront on a street and talk; Wallace shakes his head; a stable boy brings August's rig up the street. The men shake hands, August mounts his rig and drives into the storm.

## SCENE 5 - CONT.

John stands on the hearth and stirs the fire. Anna comes in.

ANNA

Did Katie go up?

JOHN

I don't care what she thinks she knows.

ANNA

She's a child.

JOHN

And if she gets it in her head to talk to August?

ANNA

She won't. She's not a fool.

Anna sits at the table and puts a fresh bottle down.

JOHN

This won't end easy.

ANNA

We don't know that.

JOHN

You know.

ANNA

Have your drink.

(Pause.)

I thought we'd have the whole night to ourselves. I hoped Katie wouldn't make it home.

JOHN

You'd have worried all night.

He stands next to her at the table;  
she puts her arms around his waist.

ANNA

We could have pretended, for one night. Had the house to ourselves.

Anna walks to the stairway and  
leans against the door.

ANNA (CONT'D)

God, I hate him. Beyond all —

JOHN

I know.

ANNA

--fairness or explanation. When you're gone--

JOHN

Anna--

ANNA

When you're gone, I'll hate him more. It isn't all his fault, it isn't fair, is it? You're the poet, John, explain how that works.

(Pause.)

No? You can't.

JOHN

I don't know what you want me to say.

ANNA

You have more to do?

JOHN

No. I'll stay up awhile in case he tries to make it back.

ANNA

I'm surprised he even went into town. He's been feeling lousy lately, but he's stubborn.

Anna starts to cry; John goes to her, hesitates.

ANNA (CONT'D)

What's the use?

(Long pause.)

I'm tired. Don't stay up long — I'll look in on Katie. Maybe I'll come back and have a drink with you. We shouldn't, I don't know if I can trust myself.

(Looks at a dark window.)

The storm sounds bad.

Anna kisses him and opens the stairway door.

ANNA (CONT'D)

Good night, John.

She wipes her face, straightens her dress, and heads out the door up the stairs. John goes into the barn.

He checks the livestock, kicks at the door, mumbles to himself, takes a swig from the bottle in his hand, and goes back in the house.

Anna walks to Katie's bedroom door; she starts to speak but doesn't; she stares at the door, sees light underneath it, listens, hears nothing, turns, opens the door to her own room and goes in.

Katie lies in bed beneath a quilt; she listens to her mother outside, holds her breath.



When she hears her mother's door close she pulls her knees up to her chest, closes her eyes, stretches flat beneath the quilt, opens her eyes, reaches out to the night stand next to her bed, takes a book, opens it, reads.

SCENE 5-B.

Storm in the countryside, then the farmyard, then the house disappears in the snow.

## SCENE 6

John sits at the table with a bottle in front of him. The fire is the only light in the room; storm sounds; he hums a song. He stops, mumbles, pours himself a drink, stumbles to the door to the barn, opens it, snow blows in. He shuts the door, crosses to the front door, opens it a crack, shuts it, walks back to the fireplace. He stares at the fire, sits at the table, pours from the bottle into his cup and drinks.

JOHN

(Mutters a few words in Norwegian, switches to English.)

Come all the way here. Same fucking thing. Not for Anna. Not Katie neither.

John's shoulders slump. Katie enters, closes the door, walks to the fireplace in front of him.

KATIE

I thought you'd be asleep by now.

JOHN

No. Stayed up--your father.

Katie looks at the bottle.

KATIE

I can see you were worried. It's cold upstairs. I'm making tea if you want some.

JOHN

I'm fine. Your mother found me a bottle before she went to bed.

KATIE

Can I have a drink?

JOHN

By all means--much as you please. Will a cup do?

KATIE

I'll get a glass from the cupboard.  
 (She does so.)  
 Just a little, John. I'm not used to it.

JOHN

Not like me.

KATIE

I don't blame you.

JOHN

Not so disappointed?

KATIE

That wasn't about your drinking.

JOHN

You think you see things, but your mother's right. You go too far.

KATIE

This is my house. She's my mother.

JOHN

I know. I got no right, never have, anywhere I've ever been. Won't stay here, not now.

John gets up, starts to put on his coat.

KATIE

Where are you going?

John looks at his coat, looks at Katie, shakes his head, stands for a second and laughs.

JOHN

I don't know. I've been down here alone, and I'm a little drunk.

John grins, takes off his coat and sits.

JOHN (CONT'D)

What I said before . . . That what you and me did wasn't, didn't . . . Count.

KATIE

Stop saying that.

JOHN

Look, there's things men and women do, things that matter more than they should maybe. I didn't mean that we . . .

Katie pulls an armchair near the fire and sits. She holds her glass toward John.

KATIE

Can I?

JOHN

Sure.

John pours her another drink, sits on the arm of the chair and strokes her hair.

JOHN (CONT'D)

You're beautiful. I mean it.

Katie gets up, puts a log on the fire.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Sorry.

KATIE

Don't apologize.

JOHN

I don't--

KATIE

I can't just act like she doesn't love you.

JOHN

'S not like that. We . . . it's different with her, that's all.

KATIE

I'm sure.

JOHN

I don't mean disrespect.

KATIE

I know how I . . . I mean how she feels.

(Holds out her glass again;

John fills it.)

I don't blame her. Before this, I mean before all, you know, before I thought about you and Momma, if you and I were here and you talked to me, told me I was beautiful, I could be excited. Now everything's different.

(She drinks quickly.)

JOHN

You're cold.

(He fills her glass again.)

KATIE

I'm not cold. We're talking about her.

JOHN

Not me. I'm not--

KATIE

I told you. It's all different now.

JOHN

Nothing's different--we're the same as we were.

KATIE

No--

JOHN

You're the beautiful girl like always, the same girl who's too good for them that's around here. Like I told you.

KATIE

(Her speech is slow.)

You're trying to be nice because of what you said before. Don't feel sorry for me.

John kneels in front of her, moving fast, talking fast, punctuating what he says with kisses as he strokes her legs and whispers.

JOHN

That's not it. You know the truth, Katie.

KATIE

Don't. You can't--

JOHN

Shhhhh. Of course I can.

John becomes more aggressive; Katie begins to respond, first pushes him away, then puts her arms around him, awkwardly, hesitantly, then more passionately as John begins to excite her. The conversation and the physical details shouldn't be entirely clear.

KATIE

I can't.

JOHN

Yes you can.

KATIE

John . . . Don't . . .

What happens is a short, violent, bizarre love scene. Katie is drunk and sexually excited at the same time. Muttered or improvised dialogue as the scene progresses; Katie makes objections as John goes further but he muffles them, pulls and tears at her clothes, unbuttons his trousers and pushes them down around his ankles, all the while whispering to her, alternately kissing her and covering her mouth roughly with his hand as he spreads her legs and enters her. Katie cries out and bites down on his shoulder in pain; he stops moving momentarily and then moves faster and faster until he reaches his climax. After that they are still for a few seconds, poised uncomfortably in the chair. John leans against the fireplace and arranges his clothes. Katie shrinks into the chair and pulls her clothes around herself slowly and tightly.

JOHN

You all right?

(Pause.)

Katie?

(He turns back and reaches  
toward her.)

You--

KATIE

No.

Katie pushes John away, pulls her  
clothes over her body.

KATIE (CONT'D)

Get away. Turn around.

JOHN

Let me--

(He reaches toward her.)

KATIE

(She slaps him and hisses.)

No! Get away.

Katie finishes dressing, stands,  
sits, stands again and puts the  
table between herself and John.

JOHN

Don't be like this.

KATIE

I said no. Leave me alone.

JOHN

What--

KATIE

I'm so stupid.

(Pause.)

What . . . I wasn't . . .

(Whispers.)

God knows I thought about it. I don't . .

(Looks up, focuses, then  
glares at John.)

The storm, then you were here, and all the talk about . . .

JOHN

Yeah. Well.

KATIE

I shouldn't have come downstairs. I don't feel well.

JOHN

Don't make more of this than it was.

KATIE

What?

(Looks at him again, shakes  
her head.)

What did you say?

JOHN

Maybe you're--it hurts a little sometimes, but that passes.  
Have a drink--

KATIE

I'm going to be sick.

John moves toward her; she runs to  
the door leading to the stairs.

KATIE (CONT'D)

Stay away from me. You can't talk to me like--

JOHN

Like what? Huh--you really are his daughter after all.  
Don't pretend you didn't want to. Don't pretend now I made  
you do anything you didn't want to do.

KATIE

No. I didn't want this.

JOHN

No, no--you think you can talk to me, you think you can lead  
me on any way, all the time, and then what. Huh? That's  
your pride. That hurts too, but it'll pass, little girl.

KATIE

That's not what --

JOHN

You thought about it? You are happy when I tell you you're  
beautiful. But when I want to do something about it, then  
you're--

KATIE

Stop it.



John sits down, pours himself a drink. Katie rushes past him into the kitchen.

Katie runs to the sink in the dark and is sick; she tries to run water from the frozen pump, uses water from a pail instead. She finds a cloth, opens the stove, throws in some kindling, stirs up the fire, heats water enough to clean her face. She unbuttons her dress, thinks better of it, closes the buttons, scrubs at her face. She stops, cries, then grabs the towel and throws it as hard as she can across the room.

KATIE

Idiot!

Katie wipes her face on her sleeve, stands up straight, stares at the dim light coming through the door. She pushes the door open, enters the parlor and stands behind the chair, keeping it between her and John.

JOHN

All better now?

KATIE

God, you're hateful.

JOHN

If it wasn't the middle of fucking winter I'd go. You know that? Right this--

KATIE

You think I'd care?

JOHN

Why should I stay?

KATIE

This doesn't change anything between you and her. Just between you and me.

JOHN

What does that mean?

KATIE

You got what you wanted, but now you stay away from me, you hear me? Now you make your choice, that's all. Now--

JOHN

(Laughs.)

I told you--it's fucking. That's all.

KATIE

You're a coward. You'd leave her? You know she loves--

JOHN

That's . . . It's none of your business, not your concern. There's things you don't understand.

KATIE

This . . .

(Pause.)

I don't . . . You wanted me, and you took what you--

John walks up to Katie and threatens her, biting off his words.

JOHN

It's what I told you before. It's what the grown-ups do, and now you see. If you don't like it, too bad, but don't try--

KATIE

I don't believe you. I don't understand you.

JOHN

No, you don't. So the best thing is be quiet.

KATIE

What--

JOHN

(He grabs Katie's arm.)

Get out of here. Leave me alone before something else happens you don't understand.

KATIE

(She breaks loose from him.)

Gladly. No, wait. After what you've done--

Katie grabs a glass and pours a drink; she drains it, choking as she finishes.

JOHN

I told you, don't try nothing. Don't say nothing, you hear me?

Katie stumbles to the stairs, goes through the door and closes it behind her.

She stops after she closes the door; she breathes hard, shuts her eyes, turns around, walks up the stairs, stops outside her mother's room, looks at the door, turns away and enters her own room.

John gets up, knocks his chair over. He mutters unintelligibly.

Anna hears noise in the hall as Katie enters her room, sits up, falls back against her pillow, pulls the comforter up around her. After a few seconds she gets up, puts on a robe and goes out into the hall.

Anna taps quietly on Katie's bedroom door.

ANNA

(Quietly.)

Katie?

(Pause.)

Katie? Are you —

KATIE

I'm fine, Momma. Everything's fine.

ANNA

What were you —

KATIE

Nothing. I needed to warm up so I went down for tea is all. I'm sleepy. Night, Mother.

ANNA

You all right?

KATIE

I told you. G'night. I'm fine, Momma.

Anna looks at the door, her hand on the doorknob, then goes back into her own room.

John sits at the table, pours himself a drink, stands by the fire, looks at the armchair, smiles, laughs, sits in the chair, stares into the fire.

JOHN

Course she'll go tell Momma.

(He gets up to stir the fire.)

So what . . . I don't care. I got nothing to be ashamed of.

(Pause.)

Her mother, all the good, normal folks, they can tell. There he is. He's not right. I can't be easy with them, can't be how they are, I don't believe any of it, their stupd, stupid . . . I see them and I want to hit them.

John kicks at the grate, pushes himself from the mantle.

SCENE 6-A.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

August drives his sled in the storm; the road is buried by the storm though the horse manages to hold to it; the sled makes little headway in the snow and wind.

## SCENE 7

Katie lies in bed, bundled in a nightgown beneath two comforters, mouth slightly open, clearly passed out.

Anna swings her legs out from beneath her comforter, dresses in the dark. She walks across the room, eases her door open and goes into the dark hall.

John sleeps in the chair; Anna enters from the stairs. Anna builds the fire up, looks at John. She crosses to the table, takes a candle, lights it from the fire, and takes Katie's empty glass into the kitchen.

Anna sees the towel Katie used earlier, picks it up, goes to the sink, opens the stove, adds more wood until the fire is high, puts a kettle on, washes out Katie's glass, rinses her hands, and returns to the parlor.

Anna watches John sleep; she hears the kettle whistle and goes back into the kitchen. In a few seconds she returns with two cups of tea puts them on the table. She crosses to John in the chair and shakes him.

ANNA

John. Wake up, John.

JOHN

Who--

John sees Anna, looks around the room.

JOHN (CONT'D)

How long have I been sleeping? Where's Katie?

Upstairs, asleep. Why? ANNA

Huh? JOHN

I heard her go past my door so I got up. I knocked on her door but she didn't say much. She was down here with you drinking. ANNA

You don't know anything. JOHN

I saw her glass. And you didn't get sick in the sink. What happened? She wouldn't talk to me. ANNA

What? JOHN

What happened. ANNA

Nothing. JOHN

Tell me the truth. ANNA

What? JOHN

What happened? ANNA

Nothing happened. JOHN

You owe me the truth. You and I-- ANNA

Fuck? JOHN

She's my daughter. And your friend. You and me . . . ANNA  
(Long pause.)

JOHN

(He pours himself a drink.)

You want one? No? Yeah, she's your daughter, a younger you in every way.

ANNA

What does that mean?

JOHN

Figure it yourself. You're both so smart, right? Smarter than the hired hand, the bastard boy.

ANNA

I don't think that way. You know that.

John starts to sit, Anna pulls at his arm; John pulls away violently and she falls, first against the table and then to the floor. John doesn't move to help her but sits and drinks. Anna leans back against the table and sits on the floor.

JOHN

Both of you, shut up, be quiet and leave me alone. Leave me out of your whole fucking mess.

ANNA

You're pretending--

JOHN

Pretending?

ANNA

That you're hard. You're not. You try to be, but you're not.

John puts his head in his hands, helps Anna up from the floor. Anna straightens herself, looks at John, stands with her back to the fire.

JOHN

This place. It eats you up. I can't any more, you know? I . . . I'm . . .

ANNA

What?

JOHN

Sick. It's what everybody thinks I am, only worse.

ANNA

Don't be stupid, John. Nothing's so awful.

JOHN

No?

ANNA

You and Katie, you can stop whatever foolishness there is, she's just a girl in love with the first man who's crossed her path, that's all. You have to be strong--

JOHN

And if I like it?

Anna slaps him; John grabs her hand, rubs his face, smiles.

JOHN (CONT'D)

You don't picture your little girl with me, do you? I'm good enough for you, though. Like mother, like daughter--

ANNA

Stop it.

JOHN

--I can tell you. Good enough for her, too.

ANNA

You bastard.

JOHN

So. After all.

ANNA

Katie wouldn't--

JOHN

No? Ask her. Apparently I make her forget who I am--

ANNA

Stop it. Katie--

JOHN

What about her?



ANNA

You want to hurt me, hurt August, I don't blame you, but you don't use her to do it.

John takes Anna's arm and speaks slowly and quietly, their faces very close to each other.

JOHN

We, Katie and me . . .

ANNA

What?

(Pause.)

You wouldn't—

JOHN

We f—

ANNA

Shut up.

Anna jerks her arm away from John, walks to the stairway door, stops, looks back at him.

ANNA (CONT'D)

My daughter?

JOHN

What do you think happens when she comes down here to talk to me?

Anna turns around, completely lost. She struggles, gains control of herself enough to speak.

ANNA

If he even suspects, he'll have the law, or his friends. They'd be only too glad to--Jesus, they'll murder you.

JOHN

You'd tell him? You'd do that?

ANNA

Don't be stupid. I don't want to ruin my daughter's life. I don't— the point is you've got to go, now, before—

JOHN

I'll leave when I want to.

ANNA

All right, all right, but you've got to be smart, and you have to be quiet. You have to--you know what he's like, he's suspicious, he doesn't like you anyway, you know how he is about Katie. If he suspects anything he'll go crazy and she'll be finished.

JOHN

Anna, I . . .

ANNA

What?

JOHN

What I told you, about me and her, I wasn't . . . It's just you made me crazy, it's not--

There is a loud noise from the yard. Anna and John freeze.

August struggles with the barn door, calls out for help but can't be heard clearly in the storm.

Anna walks quickly to the stairs; John opens the door to the barn, looks back at Anna.

JOHN

Jesus, the son-of-a-bitch --

ANNA

You don't say anything to him. Whatever happens keep your mouth shut. We have to--

John closes the door. As he does they hear the barn door open.

JOHN

What do you want me to --

AUGUST

(Shouting from offstage in the barn.)

Jens, give me a hand. I can't shut the damn thing.

ANNA

Go on.

John gets his coat and exits; Anna starts toward him, stops, goes out the door and heads up the stairs.

John and August have to shout to be heard over the storm noise; they struggle to get the barn door closed from inside; when they succeed they are panting. August shakes himself, laughs.

AUGUST

Poor beast--I thought we'd both had it. I didn't think Susie had it in her--me neither. Jesus, I could use a drink. I'm frozen through.

JOHN

Go on in--I'll take care of the horse and rig.

AUGUST

I thought I heard somebody else.

JOHN

What?

AUGUST

When I got in, I thought I heard--

JOHN

Anna was down. She's gone back up.

AUGUST

Anna?

August throws some horse tack on the ground.

AUGUST (CONT'D)

Anna? You mean Mrs. Larsen? Straighten that out proper in the morning.

JOHN

Horse's in bad shape.

AUGUST

She'll live.

JOHN

(Still not looking around.)

I'll be done in a couple of minutes. You should get inside before the cold--

AUGUST

Just put the rig away before you come in. The horse is all right. You hear me?

August goes through the door to the house.

Anna hears August come in, goes up to her room and closes the door behind her.

August comes in, warms himself at the fire, takes his coat off, hangs it up. He sees the tea cups, bottle, and Katie's clean glass on the table. John comes in and stands by the fire, as far away from August as possible. August sits at the table. John takes off his coat, hangs it up. August nods toward the bottle.

AUGUST

Don't blame you in this weather. It's terrible out there.

JOHN

I'm surprised you made it back tonight.

AUGUST

Probably not the smartest thing-- Wallace and them tried to stop me, but why stay in town. Susie worked hard today, but I don't think I hurt her.

JOHN

I'll check her before I sleep.

AUGUST

How much have you had?

JOHN

Not nearly enough to get the taste of this place out of my mouth.

AUGUST

No need for that kind of talk.

John turns, picks up the bottle.

JOHN

You want a glass?

AUGUST

Cup clean?

JOHN

Anna--Mrs. Larsen brought me in tea.

AUGUST

What was she doing . . . Why were you--

JOHN

She was cold, checking on Katie.

AUGUST

Checking on Katie?

John hands a cup to August. They raise their cups to each other. They drink silently for a few seconds; August gets up, stands by the fire; John is nearly asleep at the table. Finally August claps John on the shoulder, very friendly.

JOHN

You were gone all day and night, man. They can't stay locked in their rooms just because I was down here, can they. So what if they did.

AUGUST

Did what?

JOHN

Come down for a drink with me.

(Pause.)

Anna, she don't care much for the stuff, don't care much for me having it neither. Truth be told neither does Katie.

AUGUST

What do you mean?

JOHN

Your Katie's a good girl. Good girl. She liked the drink too—and she's a beauty. The boys will be coming round pretty soon, August. Bees to honey—

AUGUST

You don't talk about her like that.

JOHN

No? Better get used to it, old man.

AUGUST

That's enough. You're drunk, but we'll talk about this come later, count on it.

Anna comes out of her room, moves silently in the dark just inside the door to the parlor so she can hear.

JOHN

Talk about . . . No, no, August. Don't get the wrong idea. We, I was stranded here, you see, so we were all talking, all the damn day, all of us was talking . . . Well, you know how women get, don't you.

AUGUST

That's enough.

JOHN

You think so?

Anna turns to go upstairs, then comes back down to listen.

JOHN

You don't get it —

August starts toward the stairs;  
John blocks his way.

AUGUST

Out of my way.

JOHN

Don't get upset, now. Have a seat—have a drink with me before you go to sleep. Shouldn't go to sleep cold. I don't mean nothing by what I say. I'm just a little drunk.

August backs up as he speaks.

AUGUST

Don't . . .

JOHN

Don't what?

AUGUST

Talk about her like that.

JOHN

Who?

August falls into a chair at the table. John grabs the bottle, fills both their cups.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Anna? Katie? Yeah, Katie—I told you, better get used to it.

AUGUST

I won't have it. You--

JOHN

Me?

AUGUST

--and your sneering, your drinking. You think I don't see how you look at her? A young girl like her. I been watching you. I've had enough. Tomorrow you go, you understand? You leave, you get out of my house--

JOHN

Jesus. There ain't nothing between your daughter and me. She wanted to try aquavit is all. Anyway she's old enough to know her mind.

AUGUST

You think I won't get back from Erskine, so you give her liquor—of course she won't have nothing to do with you, just look at you.

JOHN

Nothing to do with me, huh.

AUGUST

I'll have the sheriff--

JOHN

You old fool. Calm down and have your drink. I'll be happy to get out of here. I'll go right now. You can get your horse in the morning, when the storm clears.

AUGUST

You won't take no rig--

Anna pushes the door open and comes in.

ANNA

You're back, August? I didn't think you'd try to come through the storm but I'm glad you made it.

AUGUST

What are you doing down--

ANNA

I heard the two of you, loud enough to wake the house.

Anna walks to the table, picks up the bottle, smiles at them.

ANNA (CONT'D)

Heating up, huh? Must be--

AUGUST

I asked you a question.

ANNA

Why I'm downstairs in my own house when I hear you come home?

John moves toward the stairs.

JOHN

I'm gone.

AUGUST

We ain't done. And you're damn sure not taking my horse.

ANNA

What are you talking about?



JOHN

He kicked me out of the house and thinks I'm walking through the snow to Erskine.

AUGUST

You leave with what you brought.

ANNA

August, what are you talking--

AUGUST

You know what he's been up to? Do you?

ANNA

Calm down, both of you.

AUGUST

Maybe it's fine with you.

John walks to the coat rack, gets his coat, spits in the fire, closes in on August.

JOHN

Maybe it is.

ANNA

Both of you, think for a second. It's the drink and the storm talking.

AUGUST

It's fine with you if he gives Kadlin liquor? Tries God-knows-what with her? Or maybe you want him to stay, maybe you--

ANNA

Stop it, August.

AUGUST

Don't you take his part.

JOHN

I'm not walking anywhere in the storm, and I'm not spending another night in this house. The barn's fine for me.

John opens the door to the barn.

AUGUST

Don't tell me what you are or aren't--

JOHN

No?

John goes into the barn.

ANNA

August--

AUGUST

Don't interfere. You heard him. Did you know that he and Kadlin--

ANNA

It was nothing. A drink on a cold night with a friend.

August lunges across the table,  
grabs the bottle out of Anna's  
hands, swings it at her and misses.

AUGUST

I won't have it--that bastard. I won't have it. You hear me? You get out of here before I forget myself.

August rushes from the room to the barn; Anna calmly starts to clean up, no expression on her face.

John lights a lantern; the barn is dim when August enters; John picks up a grooming brush.

AUGUST

What're you doing?

Anna straightens the room, opens the door to the stairs, listens, smooths her hair, goes into the kitchen.

Anna lights a match, finds an extinguished candle, lights it, starts to wash up.

August and John are hard to see and  
hear in the half-light and noise  
from the storm.

AUGUST

I asked you what--

JOHN

She's in bad shape. She don't deserve what you did to her.  
(He looks toward a dark part  
of the barn.)

It's o.k., Susie.

August looks around the barn, picks  
up an axe. John turns around, sees  
it in his hand, grins at August.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Gonna' chop wood this time of night?

AUGUST

I told you clear out. I mean it. I don't want you another  
minute in my house.

JOHN

I'll sleep here tonight. But I ain't dying because you're  
crazy mad about something you got no idea about.

August points the axe at John with  
one arm.

AUGUST

I said get out. I mean it.

JOHN

And I told you--

AUGUST

You tell me nothing. I'm not afraid--

John steps quickly toward him;  
August backs up, stumbles.

JOHN

No?

AUGUST

A girl like her.

JOHN

It's not Katie you need worry over, August.

AUGUST

I bet she spit in your face.

Anna comes into the room from the kitchen, straining to hear their voices from the barn.

JOHN

You that blind?

AUGUST

With the likes of you? Don't make me laugh. She'd have you thrown out on the shit pile first. Little bastard like you.

JOHN

Shut up.

August swings at John with the axe to keep him away.

AUGUST

I'll show you.

As he stumbles, August catches John just above the boot, drawing blood.

JOHN

(Pulls away in pain.)

Jesus! What the hell--

AUGUST

Get away from me -

August scrambles to his feet; he and John struggle; John knocks the axe out of his hands. August slaps John's face with an open hand. John steps back, looks at the blood on his hand from the wound on his leg, laughs, looks at August, and moves deliberately toward him. August backs away slowly toward the barn door.

AUGUST (CONT'D)

Get away.

Anna hears the sounds of the fight from the barn, closes her eyes, gets up from the table, and leaves by the stairs.

John grabs August and knocks his arm down as August tries to throw a punch; August fights back, grabs at the neck of John's coat, pulls it open and tears a button on John's shirt; John picks up the axe from the floor, hits August hard in the face twice with the handle while holding him up with his other hand; August is bleeding from his nose and mouth; John drops the axe and punches August full in the face before he lets him drop to his knees.

As August falls he cries out in pain, grabs his left arm, stares at John, tries to speak, can't, falls backward on the barn floor, hits his head hard. John steps back, wipes his mouth on the sleeve of his coat, looks at the blood on his leg, and spits on August.

JOHN

An axe? You crazy?

John pushes him over with his foot. August grabs his left arm, chokes, sputters, and then is still. John prods him with his boot.

JOHN (CONT'D)

All right, that's enough. Get up.

John kneels and shakes August's body.

JOHN (CONT'D)

August, come on. Get up. It's finished, get up now.

John struggles to roll August over, succeeds, looks into August's open eyes, pulls back.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Come on, now.

John shakes August by the shoulders, gets no response, leans his ear against August's chest, listens by August's mouth, shakes him by the shoulders again, and then lets him fall heavily against the barn floor. John picks up August's head, notices blood on the back of it, lets it drop again, wipes the blood from his hands on August's coat.

JOHN (CONT'D)

What the . . .

John stands up, winces, stares for a moment at August, and enters the house. (The entire fight should take no more than a minute or two.)

John pulls his coat off, pulls his boots off and rolls his pant leg up to look at the cut on his leg. He mutters, gets up, and goes into the kitchen.

Anna stands outside her open bedroom door; she hears John downstairs, closes her bedroom door and goes back to the parlor.

She enters and finds the room empty; John comes in from the kitchen with a wet towel dabbing at the shallow cut on his leg. Anna stares at the blood on John's torn clothes.

ANNA

How--

JOHN

It's not serious.

ANNA  
(Looks at the door to the  
barn.)

Where is he?

John pulls a chair from the table  
and sits near the fire.

In the barn.

JOHN

Why--

ANNA

Where's Katie?

JOHN

ANNA  
Sound asleep. Leave her alone. And keep your voice down.

JOHN  
He got it in his head that I'd done something to Katie, and  
he got nuts.

Anna goes to John's chair, takes  
the cloth from his hand, looks at  
the cut on his leg.

He did this?

ANNA

Yeah. Swung at me with an axe.

JOHN

What?

ANNA

JOHN  
Katie and me. August got it in his head that I done  
something to her--

To Katie?

ANNA

JOHN  
Yeah. He was crazy, you heard him, kept telling me to get  
out. I was in the barn, rubbing Susie down was all, he  
followed me. We had a fight . . . It was over quick, he went  
down, grabbed his arm and went down or something. I don't  
know. He just--he fell.

ANNA  
What do you mean?

JOHN  
August, he fell.

ANNA  
What do you mean, he fell?

JOHN  
It was just a stupid fight, he said things, I was drunk--

ANNA  
He fell.

JOHN  
I only hit him with my fists, not that hard. He hit me first with the axe. He was going to--

ANNA  
He's dead?

JOHN  
What?

ANNA  
Is he dead?

JOHN  
Yes.

(Pause.)  
How did you know? I didn't . . . Before he fell, I hit him two, maybe three times.

ANNA  
And?

JOHN  
There's blood. When he fell, he hit his head, there's blood on the back of it. I never meant--

ANNA  
Listen to me. That's not how it happened. You didn't kill him, John. He just . . . He died. His chest pains--the doctor warned him, but August is stubborn, said it wasn't anything.

JOHN  
Jesus. He's dead, we went outside and I wanted to kill him and we fought and now he's dead. You and me, thi morning, all day, this afternoon we talked about how--



ANNA

No--

JOHN

--everything'd be easier if he was gone. I told you, I'm, there's something, a sickness--

ANNA

That was talk, John. This was an accident, his heart quit. He died. You didn't kill him. And you never hurt Katie, did you?

(Pause.)

Did you?

JOHN

What?

ANNA

Hurt Katie.

JOHN

No. Of course not. No.

ANNA

Stop thinking the way you're thinking. You didn't kill anybody.

JOHN

They'll hang me.

ANNA

Nobody knows any of this. Don't think like that.

JOHN

You weren't there.

ANNA

I know how it happened. How to tell it.

JOHN

How can you be so sure?

ANNA

Because we have to be.

JOHN

So I just forget--

ANNA

If there were time, I could tell you things about him . . .  
But there isn't. We have to think what we do now.

John stares at her, takes the cloth  
from her, daubs at his leg,  
straightens out his pant leg, puts  
his boots on, gets up, leans  
against the table, pours a glass,  
and offers her one. She shakes her  
head.

JOHN

So what do we do.

ANNA

Leave him in the barn, like it was an accident there.

JOHN

We can't leave him in the barn.

ANNA

You're right. That doesn't explain the blood.

JOHN

I'll go into Erskine, get the sheriff, explain--

ANNA

You can't. You want to try to explain? He comes home and  
finds you alone in the house with me and Katie and you have a  
fight?

JOHN

But you said, they don't know.

ANNA

And you don't know what he's told them. You're right. We  
have to get him out of the barn.

JOHN

And Katie? What do we tell--

ANNA

I don't . . . Don't think about that now. John--John.  
Listen to me.

(She shakes him.)

Listen to me.

JOHN

What?

ANNA

August is dead, no matter what you do. It was his heart. You were angry, so what? You said yourself you didn't want him dead, but now he is--do you want to pay for that the rest of your life? Do you want me to pay the rest of mine?

JOHN

That's not--

ANNA

What's important is what we do now. We can be destroyed--all of us, Katie too, or we can figure a way out.

JOHN

Katie?

ANNA

Her father's dead. You're . . . If we get caught up in all this, what happens to her?

(Pause.)

What?

JOHN

A way out.

ANNA

We need to get him out of here.

John turns away from her. Finally he speaks, still looking away from her.

JOHN

We clean him up. His face, I mean. Then we put him on the sled, I put Susie behind, drive another horse a few miles toward town, push the body out into the snow. Turn Susie loose, and I ride the other horse back here. If she--

ANNA

She?

JOHN

Susie. If she don't come back, someone will find her, sooner or later. Or she finds her way back here on her own.

ANNA

Without the body.

JOHN

When the storm stops, I go look for him, or I go get somebody to help me look. If we're lucky, they'll think he fell from the sled in the storm and got hurt when he fell.

ANNA

I'll clean up here.

JOHN

If Katie hears--

ANNA

We need to be quick.

JOHN

If she--

ANNA

She won't, she's young, she's not used to liquor, she sleeps sound. Hurry up, unless you want to give up--it's our only chance.

She goes behind him, grabs him from behind, turns him toward her and kisses him.

ANNA (CONT'D)

We have to do this.

They kiss again and go quickly into the barn. If there's video the scene below happens; otherwise there's noise in the dark of a sled leaving the barn, and Anna re-enters the house.

## SCENE 7-A

Video:

John and Anna struggle to put August's body in the sled; when they have it in the sled John harnesses a horse in front of the sled, puts a saddle behind the seat, and ties Susie behind the sled; they push the barn door open, and stand looking out at the storm for a moment before John mounts the sled.

John drives off; August's body sways in the driver's seat next to him; Anna is framed in the dim light from the barn.

SCENE 7: CONT.

Anna walks up the stairs with a lamp; she listens outside Katie's door, crosses the hall, opens her door, stands in the doorway looking down the hall at Katie's door, finally closes her own. Empty hallway.

SCENE 7-B

John drives into the storm. He looks behind him at Susie. They are barely visible in the storm at night.

Long shot of the disappearing road in the night in the storm; then a closeup of the sled. August's body falls away toward the outside; John stops the sled, grabs the body and pulls him back hard onto the seat. He breathes hard and stares at the body.

John gets down from the sled, walks around to the front and pats the lead horse, walks back to Susie, leans against her, breathing hard and patting her. Susie is panting hard.

John climbs back into the sled, wedges August's body tightly in the seat, snaps the reigns; the horse pulls the sled slowly into the darkness.

More light. John stops the sled, gets down, moves slowly, deliberately;

he pushes August's body out of the sled onto the ground, goes around to the back and leans against Susie's neck, whispers in her ear and leads her to the front of the sled. He switches Susie with the other horse, puts her in the traces of the sled and saddles the other horse; he treats both horses with great gentleness, feeds Susie with a bag he'd brought from the farm, pats her before he turns his back and mounts the saddled horse. Before he leaves he looks down at August.

John rides away from the sled into the snow, the body and Susie; Susie noses August's body, stands for a minute or so, then she walks off painfully slowly, pulling the sled behind her.

#### Scene 7-c

John pulls the barn doors closed, throws a saddle and tack over a stall and speaks to an invisible horse.

JOHN

Good boy. You'll be all right, now. Quiet, now.

#### Scene 7-d

Sled; Susie stumbles; the sled makes slow progress along a buried track.

#### Scene 8

Faint morning light; John comes in and sits slumped at the table. Anna enters from the stairway, crosses to the fireplace and stirs up the embers. Each waits for the other to speak. Anna breaks the silence, speaking quietly.

ANNA  
What--

JOHN  
You don't need no details.

ANNA  
No.

JOHN  
'S done.

She gives him a bottle and a glass.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
I best not.

ANNA  
You're right.  
(Pause.)  
How far . . . Where--

JOHN  
I don't know. I told you, you don't need . . .

ANNA  
No.

JOHN  
(Barely audible.)  
I screamed at him. I don't remember what all I said, but I  
was screamed at him like some lunatic . . .

Anna goes behind him, puts her arms  
around him and pulls his head  
against her.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
Why'd I do that? Some bullshit about how maybe he was right,  
or you was right, or how I was sorry, how I didn't mean what  
happened to happen . . . Jesus! Why'd I do that?

ANNA  
I don't know. Some kind of--

JOHN  
You were right. I ain't even hard enough.

ANNA  
Shhh. Quiet, now, don't worry. Don't think about it.

She moves so she can see him, looks at him and kisses him.

ANNA (CONT'D)

It's done. There's nothing--

JOHN

Right. I know. I'm dead tired.

John leans back away from her, puts his feet on another chair, closes his eyes. Anna looks at him, walks toward the kitchen.

ANNA

I'll get you something to eat.

Fade out.

Scene 8 - Cont.

John lies stretched out in an armchair, sleeping; he's changed clothes from the night before. Bells can be heard in the barn; John hears them, sits up, rubs his face, looks at the fireplace, gets up and stirs the fire. He hears the bells again, looks at the door to the barn.

JOHN

Jesus. What the--how the fuck did you manage to get here.

He gets up and moves quickly into the barn.

John pushes the barn doors open; finds Susie in the harness of the sled, barely able to stand; the light from offstage is blinding.

Fade out.



## Scene 9

Empty room: bright sunlight comes in the windows. The table is clean, the chairs pushed under it, cups and plates set for four places; the fire burns brightly. Wind sounds. Katie enters from the stairs.

KATIE

Momma? John? What was--

Anna comes in from the kitchen with coffee.

ANNA

Good morning.

Katie sits; Anna puts the coffee down and sits across from her.

KATIE

I'm starving.

ANNA

There's food in the kitchen. I'll bring it out.

KATIE

Let me help.

ANNA

No, don't bother--I've eaten already. You look tired. What's--

KATIE

Last night I thought . . . I was asleep last night--I had a drink with John earlier. Then when I was upstairs, sleeping, I thought I heard somebody come in. I don't know--the storm, maybe. Looks like it's finished. The snow anyway.

ANNA

For now. You all right?

KATIE

It's as if the world vanished--like it's been erased. The white from the windows hurt my eyes.

ANNA

I'll get you something to eat.

KATIE

It can wait. Sit, talk to me. Please. Last night I said things I didn't mean. I'm sorry. I should know better.

ANNA

Don't think about it.

KATIE

Momma.

ANNA

What?

KATIE

Last night--

Anna gets up from the table.

ANNA

I told you, don't think about it. Both of us--

KATIE

No, not that. Not just that. After you went to bed . . . It's . . . When John and I were down here together.

ANNA

(Freezes at the kitchen door.)

What?

Katie eats for a few seconds in silence.

KATIE

Nothing. I just had too much to drink.

Anna goes into the kitchen, comes back out quickly and sits across from her daughter.

ANNA

You all right now?

KATIE

I'm fine. Why? Did something—did he say something?

ANNA

No. Why?

KATIE

Nothing. I told you, I thought I heard something. Did Poppa come home? I thought I heard the sled after I went up.

ANNA

There's no sign of him. I haven't seen John this morning. I'm sure your father wouldn't try to come back in the storm.

KATIE

I guess not.

John enters from the barn; he sees Katie, goes to the fire, takes off his coat, and drops fresh wood by the fireplace.

ANNA

I didn't know you were out. You want breakfast? Coffee?

JOHN

No. Not now. There's something--something happened.

Katie looks down at her cup.

ANNA

What is it?

JOHN

Just now, maybe twenty minutes ago, I don't know exactly, I heard the rig outside the barn, so I opened up and there she was with the rig, only the sled was empty.

KATIE

She? Who?

JOHN

The horse. Susie.

KATIE

But--

JOHN

The sled was empty. Your father wasn't in it.

Katie looks at Anna, then at John.

KATIE

What do you mean? Where is he?  
 (To Anna.)  
 What did I hear last night?

John walks away from both women,  
 his back to them. Katie follows  
 him and grabs his arm, tries to  
 turn him around; John shrugs her  
 off.

KATIE (CONT'D)

What happened?

ANNA

Katie--

Katie turns and glares at her  
 mother.

JOHN  
 (Turns to face them.)

It was--there wasn't no sign of him. Susie's half-dead from  
 the cold. I did what I could for her. Then I heard you and  
 I came in here.

KATIE

I . . . You took care of the horse--you took care of the  
 horse before--

ANNA

Katie--

Katie sits down.

KATIE

Where is he? Do you know?

ANNA

Was there anything in the sled, anything you could see--

KATIE  
 (To John.)

I heard something last night, I know I did. I heard the sled  
 in the barn, the horse coming in. And voices--

ANNA

This morning?

KATIE

That's not what I mean. I told you, I heard somebody last night--

JOHN

You couldn't have. She--Susie--didn't get here 'til just now. And there's no sign of your father. Sorry, Mrs. Larsen.

KATIE

Mrs. Larsen? Why are you still--

The three of them freeze; finally Anna sits next to Katie and takes her hands.

ANNA

It could be nothing--maybe Poppa lost control of the sled somewhere along the road and he's gone back into town, or he's in somebody's house, we don't know. The horse is alive, so--

KATIE

He said she's nearly dead. Poppa's been out in the snow all night.

Katie stares at John, then leans against Anna, who looks over her at John.

JOHN

Your mother's right, Katie. He may be all right. We don't know.

ANNA

Katie--

Katie goes to the stairway door, turns back to them.

KATIE

If you won't do anything, I will. I'm going to look for him--

JOHN

You won't last an hour out there.

KATIE

The snow's stopped.

JOHN

There's no road, everything's frozen solid. I'll go, not you. I need to get some food in me. I'll start after I eat. Maybe I can find the sled's tracks, though with the drifts--

KATIE

You have to try--

JOHN

I'll take a horse and look back toward Erskine. If I can't find him--

ANNA

Katie--

KATIE

You don't even want him to try.

JOHN

I'll try. I can't promise, that's all.

KATIE

(To Anna.)

How can you be so--

ANNA

Stop it.

KATIE

--cold?

Anna tries to embrace Katie; she resists, but Anna succeeds; she looks over Katie's shoulder at John.

JOHN

Give me a couple of minutes, then I'll go.

Anna lets go of Katie.

ANNA

I'll get your breakfast.

Anna goes into the kitchen; Katie opens the stairway door.

JOHN

Katie--

KATIE  
(Not looking at him.)

What.

(Pause. They stand, John  
looking at her; she doesn't  
look at him.)

JOHN

I'm sorry.

Katie turns and stares at him.

JOHN (CONT'D)

You know what I mean. Last night--

KATIE

What? I don't care about any of that. Not now.

JOHN

What you want me to say.

KATIE

What do I want? I want you to explain who I heard last  
night.

Katie looks hard at John for the  
first time all morning.

KATIE (CONT'D)

Who--

JOHN

I don't know. Nobody. That's not what I want--

KATIE

I told you, I don't care about any of that.

JOHN

You don't mean it.

KATIE

Yes, I do.

(She starts to cry.)

What do you want?

JOHN

(He moves toward her.)

Katie--

KATIE

Stay there--don't come over here or I'll . . .

(She moves away from him.)

What? What? I . . . You want me to tell you I forgive you?  
I love you, that . . . What do you want? My father is--

JOHN

Kadlin--

KATIE

No.

After a long pause John steps  
toward her.

KATIE (CONT'D)

I don't believe either one of you. And you . . . What, now  
it's all . . . You can have us both, is that . . .

Katie rushes up the stairs; Anna  
enters from the kitchen with John's  
breakfast.

JOHN

She's--

ANNA

She doesn't know what to do. It's her father, after all. She  
said that last night . . .

JOHN

What?

ANNA

Nothing. Eat.

JOHN

What did she say?

ANNA

I . . . Last night she said she thinks August'd love her more  
if she was a boy. That's hard for a girl to believe about  
her father, don't you think?

JOHN

I wouldn't know.



ANNA

He's . . . He was a hard man. It doesn't make it right, but he was hard all the same. And maybe it will make this harder for her.

John pushes his plate away, gets up, puts his coat on and goes to the door.

JOHN

I'll get started.

Anna follows him.

John picks up a saddle, moves to the back of the barn and offstage, comes back and opens the outside barn door; Anna stands near the door to the house, listening. Anna cries quietly.

JOHN

(Over his shoulder from the shadow.)

Don't.

ANNA

Don't worry. I won't come apart.

JOHN

That's not--

ANNA

He was small and mean. You said it yourself--a little dirt didn't make him anything. But that doesn't make this any less--

JOHN

Now's not the time.

ANNA

No? Then when's the time. There isn't any time, that's the thing. You got to hurry, because Katie will come down, and you have to go and pretend to look for him, then we don't know what will happen, do we? Except we do--we've known ever since--we've always known. That somehow we'd pay.

The sound of the horse being led out is heard; John comes in from the outside framed in the blinding light from offstage.

JOHN

Pay for what?

ANNA

I don't know. I used to call it sin.

JOHN

Don't be foolish.

ANNA

I don't any more. Now I think God could care less about a place like this, or about this kind of stupidity.

JOHN

What you said, that word don't mean anything.

ANNA

(She steps to him and touches  
his cheek.)

What matters is you have to go, now, or we're lost for sure, and Katie with us, you understand?

John turns from Anna and opens the door, clicks his tongue toward the horse outside.

ANNA (CONT'D)

You have to go, and when we're done we're finished. For this to work—

JOHN

I don't—

ANNA

Even if we spend every day the rest of the winter upstairs, when spring comes you'll go, I know that. We've used up every bit of whatever it is we need to get through.

JOHN

I don't . . . Don't talk like that.

ANNA

There's no other way to talk.

JOHN

Katie's right--you are cold.

ANNA

Worse than that. I'm done, John. I know when I'm played out.

There is noise from inside; Anna starts, looks at the door to the house.

Katie pulls on her coat upstairs in the hall; her door is open as she comes down the hall; she runs down the stairs.

Katie enters, finds the house empty, and goes into the barn.

JOHN

I'll be back soon as I can.

Katie enters the barn. Anna moves to the middle of the barn floor. John opens the barn door wide; the light outside floods in, blinding Anna and Katie.

KATIE

(Shields her eyes.)

I'm coming with you.

JOHN

You'll slow me down. The horse'll have to work hard enough with just me. I'll do what I can.

Katie and Anna move into the dark.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I'm going then.

ANNA

(Looks at him.)

Be careful.

JOHN

Sure.

John leads the horse through the door; the two women close the doors.

KATIE

That's it?

Anna turns and enters the house; Katie follows Anna into the room;

Anna starts to straighten the table  
and clean up the dishes as Katie  
watches her.

KATIE

Momma?

ANNA

(Without looking at her.)

What?

KATIE

Poppa's . . . He is--he's gone.

ANNA

You don't know that.

KATIE

Last night, in all the noise, in the storm, I was so sure . .  
.

Anna turns around and looks at her  
daughter.

ANNA

We don't know. We have to wait.

Katie stands still in the middle of  
the room, watches as her mother  
crosses into the kitchen, then  
comes back with a tray with a tea  
pot, cups, and a cleaning rag.  
Anna starts to scrub the table.

KATIE

Momma?

There is no answer.

KATIE (CONT'D)

Let me help with that.

ANNA

Don't bother. There's plenty of time.

Fade out.

## Scene 9-A

Video:

Bright sunlight; snow drifting; the sled's tracks can just be made out next to a mound; the only sign that the mound is August's body is one gloved hand poking just above the surface of the snow.

Blackout.